STALKE GALLERI

STALKE OUT OF SPACE

Michael Goldberg

Stalke Galleri
Admiralgade 22
3 - 25 October 1987

The American artist, Michael Goldberg, born in 1924 in New York City, is regarded as a significant figure in American Abstract Expressionism and, thereby, in American art history. He was part of "The New York School," which marked the beginning of an independent art movement, uninfluenced by European traditions.

Goldberg's early introduction to art came through the Art Students' League in New York in the late 1930s. From 1941 to 1942, and again from 1948 to 1950, after military service in the U.S. Army, Goldberg studied under the European painter and teacher Hans Hofmann. In the early 1950s, he worked on abstract paintings that referenced Kandinsky's works from the early 20th century. Afterward, Goldberg transitioned to a more lyrical and open landscape style. A similar shift can be observed when he moved from his constructed still-life paintings of 1955–56 to the open landscapes of 1958–59.

The interplay between mass and emptiness forms the essential rhythm in Goldberg's development. His early landscape paintings, created in his studio, reflect more of a working process and a feeling for nature rather than direct observation.

For Goldberg, the oscillation between his studio landscapes and still-life works is a natural tendency, making his transitions from emptiness to mass more fluid.

Goldberg belongs to the second generation of American Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s, alongside Norman Bluhm, Grace Hartigan, Al Held, Alfred Leslie, and Joan Mitchell. Signs of mutual inspiration can sometimes be seen between this second generation and the first generation, particularly between Goldberg and de Kooning, who lived near each other in New York. Key artists of the first generation include Rothko, Still, and Pollock.

In 1959, Goldberg was selected to exhibit at Documenta II in Kassel, Germany, alongside Bluhm, Hartigan, and Mitchell. The same year, he was also chosen to participate in the Fifth São Paulo Biennale in Brazil.

The connection between the first and second generations of American Abstract Expressionists is often perceived as a teacher-student relationship. However, it was not solely that; the second generation was also influenced by post-war painting, European modernist movements, and their own individual artistic struggles and integrity. These American artists themselves paved the way for proto-Pop and Minimalism, exploring new approaches to the figure, still life, and, most notably, the landscape.

As heirs to this new American tradition, this group of artists used paint rather than words to step out from the shadows of their predecessors. The works of this second generation have become influential trailblazers for subsequent decades.

To forget these artists' contributions to art would be equivalent to creating another gap in art history—a history that artists have always responded to, either by rejecting or assimilating the breakthroughs of previous generations.

(Translated from Action/Precision: The New Direction in New York, 1955-60, Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1984.)
Currently, Goldberg resides and works in New York, spending several months each year in Tuscany, Italy. He is affiliated with the Sonnabend Gallery in New York, and it is with great pleasure that we present his work in Denmark for the first time, at Stalke Galleri, Copenhagen.

Review Summary – Michael Goldberg at Stalke Galleri

In a review published in Politiken in October 1987, critic Øystein Hjort described Michael Goldberg's exhibition at the newly opened Stalke Gallery as an unexpectedly strong and welcome contribution to the Copenhagen gallery scene. The exhibition was presented as the gallery's opening show in Admiral Gade and was framed as a confident statement of artistic intent.

Hjort emphasized that Goldberg, though associated with abstract expressionism and clearly positioned in the generation following Willem de Kooning, appeared relatively unknown in Denmark at the time. The review suggested that Stalke's decision to present Goldberg signaled an ambition to connect local audiences with established international practices rather than focusing solely on emerging or domestic artists.

The paintings were described as materially rich and sensuous, marked by a deep engagement with paint as substance. According to the review, Goldberg demonstrated a refined control over his medium, balancing calculated structure with spontaneity. Gestural movements, layered surfaces, and strong chromatic intensity were highlighted as defining qualities of the works.

Hjort also noted the influence of Goldberg's time in Tuscany, particularly in the use of light and landscape-like atmospheres, while pointing out the presence of geometric elements that prevented the paintings from becoming purely expressive. This tension between geometry and painterly freedom was presented as central to the exhibition's strength.

Overall, the exhibition was assessed as both stimulating and refreshing—an affirmation of painting as a demanding yet vital practice. The review concluded by welcoming Goldberg as a significant presence in the gallery's program and, more broadly, in the Danish art context.

Source:
Review by Øystein Hjort, Politiken, Thursday, 15 October 1987.